



**ALTERNATIVES TO  
VIOLENCE PROJECT  
(VIC) Inc** RN A0036095X  
ABN 963 1213 7471

*AVP is an organisation of volunteers  
offering experiential workshops  
that empower individuals  
to liberate themselves and others  
from the burden of violence*

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## **The Alternatives to Violence Project - AVP**

### **A national and international movement for peace.**

#### ***Beginnings:***

AVP began in New York in 1975 when a group of prisoners asked Quakers to help them learn alternatives to the violence which was all they knew. It was soon recognised that mainstream society also needed to learn peaceful ways of living, and so community workshops began to run parallel with those in prisons.

#### ***International perspective:***

AVP now works its culture of peace on 6 continents. AVP is active in many different countries of the world including England, Scotland and Ireland, throughout the United States, in Russia, Georgia, Macedonia, Hungary, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, in Columbia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Brazil, in South Africa, Nigeria, and Uganda, in India and Aotearoa/New Zealand and some Pacific islands. AVP is active in all Australian states and in the ACT. At present AVP is being established in Ghana, Rwanda, and Belarus.

#### ***Personal perspective:***

AVP has become a resource not only for experiential understanding the nature of violence and its realistic alternatives but also for discovering, or rediscovering, the spirit of hope and community which lies at the heart of a nonviolent way of life.

### **What is AVP?**

#### ***Building Community:***

AVP's objective is to build community, initially through offering experiential workshops to both prison and many different types of community groups. Each workshop becomes a community where participants feel safe, valued and respected and where individual needs for time-out and privacy are honoured.

#### ***The Heart of AVP:***

AVP starts from the experience of fundamental goodness in everyone and of an experience of a power to transform violent situations that is accessible to everyone. This is the heart of AVP and the motivation of its facilitators. The program runs on a realistic trust of this goodness in everyone.

### ***“Transforming Power”:***

What AVP terms “Transforming Power” provides the context for AVP’s structure and agenda. “Transforming Power” is not dogma nor is it an item of faith. It is simply a term to refer to something that participants often experience when they respect themselves, care for others, seek a non-violent path, think before reacting, or expect the best.

### ***A Culture of Peace and Trust:***

AVP attempts to create a culture of peace and trust through the principles of respect and caring for self and others, through thinking before reacting, through seeking a non-violent path and, in all things, expecting the best. Play and humour are regarded as indispensable!

### ***Empowerment:***

AVP’s aim is empowerment to live life nonviolently. In a society where many different cultures co-exist side by side it is not possible for AVP to determine what is or is not violent. AVP, therefore, encourages each group to determine this for themselves and offers a range of alternative skills in order to increase peoples choices in responding to situations of violence.

### ***The Workshops:***

Community workshops are usually 20 hours in duration and are usually held over a weekend, with the first few hours beginning on a Friday evening “after work”, so that participants get home at a reasonable hour on Sunday night. (30 hour workshops over 3 full days is also an option). Workshop participants work in the large group, small groups, pairs and individually.

### ***Two Levels of Workshops:***

AVP offers two workshop levels - the Basic and the Second Level - to prisons and community groups of all types. Workshops are tailored to meet the needs of the group:

- *Basic Level* involves an introduction to the “building-blocks” of AVP;
- *Second Level* involves a deepening of understanding of AVP practices and principles, understanding and practising effective consensus decision making skills, and choosing as a group to work from a wide selection of focus topics. These include, among others, such issues as conflict resolution, communication, affirmation, Transforming Power, anger, grief, loss, forgiveness, stereotyping, man-woman relationships.

### ***AVP “Building Blocks”:***

Through workshops initially, AVP shares skills which promote understanding of such principles, through the practices of affirmation, community building, communication, cooperation, empathy and conflict resolution. We sometimes refer to these as the “building blocks of AVP”, for they are also the building blocks of effective community.

### ***Experiential Nature of AVP Workshops:***

AVP’s approach is experiential, making AVP uniquely adaptable across social, economic, educational and cultural differences. There is no need for notebooks and

pencils for no teaching or theory is offered in the workshop. Participants “learn” through participating. In some parts of the world, bilingual AVP workshops have been given. The AVP manuals have been translated into several different languages and, in some parts of the world, notably Aotearoa NZ, and Nigeria, AVP has been adapted by the indigenous people to strengthen fractured culture and preserve the dignity of the peoples.

***Workshop Facilitators:***

Although skilled and professional in approach, AVP facilitators regard themselves as co-learners and co-teachers along with the participants. Any one can become an AVP facilitator. Sometimes, however, it is clear that there is “too much going on” in someone’s life at a particular time for them to be a clear and uncluttered AVP facilitator - *at that time*. Such discernment should not be seen as a reflection on a person’s ability or potential as a facilitator. Indeed, the positive, creative and non-violent ways that person chooses to integrate those life experiences may contribute to a much greater suitability for them to become an AVP facilitator in the future.

***Training for Facilitation:***

This is offered to both prison inmates and community participants. Workshops are held to “Train the Facilitator”. Participants learn the processes of AVP facilitation through actually facilitating sessions of a Basic workshop with their peers as participants. Experienced AVP facilitators act as coaches and overseers throughout.

***Facilitator Selection:***

The criteria AVP uses to choose its facilitators rest not in areas of theory, expertise, or professional credentials, but rather in sincere preparedness to be open, non-judgemental and inclusive, self-disclosing and non-defensive in attitude, and to be committed to a personal awareness of the ways AVP practices and principles may help one personally grow towards a life of nonviolence.

***What does AVP cost???***

AVP fees are negotiable and all monies go to the running costs of our workshop program. For waged participants, our Basic Level workshop fee is presently \$95 (\$45 concession). However, we are currently exploring ways in which communities wishing to “run with” AVP themselves may wish to pay a flat fee of \$1000 per workshop and register as many people as they can comfortably fit into the particular workshop venue space - up to 25. In the past our Second Level fee has been somewhat higher than the Basic Level. The Training for Facilitation workshop is a little higher still. But, still, negotiable.

***Describing AVP - in a nutshell:***

AVP organisation and practices are

- grass roots — No educational or professional expertise or credentials are required; AVP facilitators come from all walks of life, cultural and religious (or non-religious) backgrounds. Anybody, at any time, may participate in an AVP workshop;
- non-hierarchical — AVP belongs to whoever does AVP, anywhere in the world, inside or outside of prison walls. AVP has no guru or leader, no headquarters. While AVP principles are understood world-wide, what constitutes AVP evolves through a process of consensus and experimentation. Organisational policy is determined on a regional basis and serves to nurture and support AVP principles.
- voluntary — Occasionally an honorarium may be given to someone to carry out essential co-ordination and administrative AVP work which the facilitators (all volunteers) have no time or energy to do. In general, however, all AVP work is completely voluntary and unpaid. This is one of the great strengths of AVP, as not only does this help build trust, but it is an example of how things of *real* value are beyond price. Just as AVP facilitators are volunteers, so too are participants. It is good to know that everyone in an AVP workshop is there because they really want to be there, and not because someone else feels they should be!
- independent — AVP keeps carefully independent of governmental, political, financial or religious bodies. AVP self-funds - community workshop fees paying for the prison workshops. Occasionally maintenance-funding may be sought from charitable institutions or a prison in an isolated area may cover facilitators' petrol and accommodation costs. Sometimes AVP facilitators personally self-fund.
- non-profit — AVP, as an organisation, exists solely to present AVP workshops in prisons and in communities; all monies received go into sustaining this work..
- self-trained — AVP is careful not to provide “therapy”, or “counselling” in the workshops; a professional therapist or counsellor may therefore not immediately have the team skills to fit them for appropriate AVP facilitation, which also provides role-modelling of non-violent alternatives. AVP provides this appropriate training through Train the Facilitator workshops, through apprenticeship facilitation, through periodic training days, and through the ongoing process of “team building” whereby community is built and maintained through the constant daily practice of AVP practices and principles outlined above.

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***Finally:***

AVP is for those committed to nonviolence, or disturbed by the level of violence in the world or in themselves. It presents alternative ways to respond to the world and it succeeds because it builds communities and nourishes souls.